

VZCZCXR08858

OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHPS #0147/01 0790725

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

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FM USOFFICE PRISTINA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8144

INFO RUEHXL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1458

RHMFIS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000147

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DEPT FOR EUR, EUR/SCE, DRL, INL, AND S/WCI, NSC FOR BRAUN,
USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/11/2018

TAGS: PGOV UNMIK KV

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ACTING U/S FRIED TELLS KOSOVARS TO STAY
THEIR MODERATE COURSE, FOCUS ON BUILDING STATE INSTITUTIONS

Classified By: COM TINA KAI DANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In Pristina March 7, acting U/S Daniel Fried, the highest-level USG official to visit Kosovo since the February 17 declaration of independence, met separately with President Sejdiu, PM Thaci, and Assembly Speaker Krasniqi to congratulate them on Kosovo's independence, encourage their admirable restraint in the face of continued provocations from Belgrade, and urge them to focus their energies on building the institutions of Europe's newest state. A/S Fried also met with Nenad Rasic and Boban Stankovic, the two moderate Serb ministers in Thaci's government, and their party leader, Slobodan Petrovic. They told Fried that they continue to suffer criticism and pressure from Belgrade and their own community, and that visible economic projects benefiting Serbs in central Kosovo would prove that participation in Kosovo institutions was worthwhile. With key internationals COMKFOR LTG Xavier de Marnhac, PDSRSG Larry Rossin and ICO head Pieter Feith, discussion centered around the need to reassert UNMIK authority in the north, to deploy the ICO/EULEX missions throughout Kosovo, and to guard against any possibility of negotiating with Belgrade that would essentially allow completely separate Serbian institutions to function in the north and in the southern Serb enclaves. Acting U/S Fried's visit served both to reinforce our strong support for Kosovo and to underscore the many challenges that lie ahead, including passing the draft Constitution and remaining minority rights provisions of Ahtisaari Plan legislation; the visit also reinforced that close international coordination is key during the post-independence period. END SUMMARY.

"Pleased to be in the Republic of Kosovo"

¶2. (C) Acting U/S Daniel Fried, in Pristina March 7, met separately with President Fatmir Sejdiu, PM Hashim Thaci, and Assembly Speaker Jakup Krasniqi. Fried told each that he was "pleased to be in the Republic of Kosovo," and congratulated his interlocutors on the dignity of Kosovo's February 17 declaration of independence. Fried strongly supported the moderation and restraint of the Kosovo leadership in response to provocations from Belgrade, and urged them to stay this admirable course. Noting that the U.S. was working hard to secure recognition of Kosovo from as many countries as

possible, Fried added that Kosovo needed to do its part by quickly passing remaining Ahtisaari Plan legislation and appointing a foreign minister who could be the face of Kosovo to the international community to counter Belgrade's own diplomatic offensive. He also encouraged them to work on building up the economy. He urged these leaders not to obsess about the duration of UNMIK's presence or specific timelines for transition, but to focus on building the institutions of a modern, democratic state, a point he emphasized as well in his public appearance with the press.

¶ 13. (C) These leaders welcomed Acting U/S Fried with warmth and gratitude for the U.S. role in promoting Kosovo independence. President Sejdiu opened his remarks by saying "you have kept your word," and promised that Kosovo would do the same by creating a democratic state that would protect minority rights, especially regarding Kosovo Serbs. PM Thaci noted that in the three weeks since independence "there had not been one interethnic incident." He underscored his commitment to approving and implementing Ahtisaari Plan legislation and promised to coordinate every significant activity of his government with the U.S. Regarding border demarcation with Macedonia, Thaci said that it was an obligation for Kosovo under the Ahtisaari Plan and would proceed "without politicization." (Comment: We have information from ICO head Pieter Feith that Thaci has agreed to appoint Kosovo's border demarcation team and understands that Macedonia's recognition of Kosovo and Kosovo's obligations to demarcate the border are separate issues. End Comment.) Speaker Krasniqi raised several important challenges, including the need to get Serb MPs back to the Assembly and Kosovo Serb police officers back on the job.

PRISTINA 00000147 002 OF 003

Kosovo Serbs Need "Visible" Economic Support

¶ 14. (C) Slobodan Petrovic, leader of the moderate Independent Liberal Party (SLS), and the two SLS minister in PM Thaci's government, Nenad Rasic and Boban Stankovic, assured Fried that they would continue to work within the government "to serve the interests of the Kosovo Serb community." Petrovic, however, described how he and his party colleagues continue to suffer criticism and pressure not only from Belgrade, but from within their own community. Asked what the international community can do to help, Petrovic replied that "visible" economic projects benefiting Serbs in central Kosovo would be of great assistance in proving to Serbs that participation in Kosovo institutions was worthwhile. Petrovic added that this sort of commitment was important, since Kosovo Serbs had only "delayed" a decision to leave Kosovo en masse instead of foregoing such a decision altogether. Rasic noted that the end of the Serbian school year in three months time would likely mark a decision point for many Serbs with children. Petrovic further noted that the northern hardline Kosovo Serb leadership was acting only in its own interest, and not in the interests of Kosovo Serbs generally.

¶ 15. (C) Acting U/S Fried asked if he could inform the U.S. Congress of the views of Petrovic and his colleagues, and was told by all that he (Fried) should feel free to use their names publicly, so as to encourage Kosovo Serbs to stay in Kosovo. Fried closed the meeting by telling these leaders that the U.S. and EU would find concrete ways to help Serbs willing to accept reality and to cooperate with the international community.

Key Internationals Discuss Customs Issues, ICO Stand-Up

¶ 16. (C) At a lunch with Acting U/S Fried, COMKFOR LTG Xavier de Marnhac agreed that UNMIK had to reassert its authority in the north or there would be the danger of hard partition. Asked if KFOR would back up this reassertion of authority -- especially the reestablishment of UNMIK customs collection at Gates 1 and D31 -- de Marnhac said that it could be done from

a military perspective, but would involve "significant operations" to maintain and sustain forces to protect customs personnel. Specifically, COMKFOR said he would need 350-500 soldiers to reestablish customs at these gates. Speaking of KFOR's overall mandate, de Marnhac said he "is fine" with UNSCR 1244, but that getting more involved with the stand-up of ICO and EULEX in the north is more difficult absent clearer political guidance. In this sense, he noted that KFOR has not yet been designated the International Military Presence (IMP), as called for in the Ahtisaari Plan. In general, de Marnhac said that there needs to be more linkage between the Serb-majority north and Serb enclaves in the south to soften the north's opposition to independence.

¶17. (C) At a dinner with PDSRSG Rossin and ICO head Pieter Feith, hosted by COM, discussion also touched on the customs issues, as well as on the question of transition more generally. Acting U/S Fried strongly encouraged Feith's intention to extend ICO's presence throughout Kosovo as soon as possible. Feith said he would need around 20 internationals and 60 local staff to do this, and would want to use discretionary funds at his disposal (around 500,000 euros) to assist and "win over" Kosovo Serb communities.

Media: Lots of Questions on Transition

¶18. (SBU) At press availabilities after the meetings with President Sejdiu and PM Thaci, Fried, who was asked mostly about how the transition period would proceed and how long UNMIK would remain, told assembled journalists that Kosovo should not focus its energies on how long or exactly what shape this transition period will take. He emphasized that this is the business of the international community, and it will sort itself out in due time. Kosovo should instead, he went on, pay attention to the many things in needs to do

PRISTINA 00000147 003 OF 003

build the institutions of a modern, democratic state.

¶19. (U) Acting U/S Fried has cleared this cable.
KAIDANOW